

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., today said that "the congressional Republican leadership should be cited for `dereliction of duties' for moving the Fiscal Year 2003 omnibus spending bill through the legislative process in such an irresponsible and improper manner."

Jackson, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, said that "despite securing funding for my district, the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois, the process for considering the bill was like choosing between the devil you know, and the devil you know better. I knew funding for job training, health care, housing, and first-responders was woefully inadequate. But I knew better that there were many provisions of the omnibus that were complete mysteries, therefore, dangerous. Several outrageous provisions included anti-environmental measures to permit spending on preparations for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, exempt regulation of Alaska's Tongass National Forest from judicial review, and open swaths of public land to the logging industry.

"Two particular provision that hit close to home involved gun safety and homeland security. A provision was inserted that precluded the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms from releasing gun tracing data to the City of Chicago for their lawsuit against the gun industry. The City of Chicago had prevailed, through the lower courts, to obtain this information and was scheduled to argue this issue before the U.S. Supreme Court on March 4, but this provision appears to have vacated that argument. Furthermore, with the Port of Chicago in the 2nd Congressional District, port security is paramount. However, funding in this bill for port security is only \$250 million, 60 percent less than what the U.S. Coast Guard says is needed.

"The mammoth \$397.4 billion Fiscal Year 2003 Omnibus covers 11 of the 13 annual appropriations bills that should have been debated separately and openly and completed over four months ago. Parts of the final package were being written at 5 a.m. yesterday, and some lawmakers did not see the finished product until midday. The measure - totaling about 3,000 pages of text - prevented most legislators the ability to review all the details of even a single appropriations bill. The sheer scope and size of this bill, combined with the absence of legislative debate on its contents, mocks the democratic process.

"The omnibus bill blatantly flew in the face of the nation's founders. They designed a representative system of government. Congress did not live up to its obligation to the American people by cramming funding for critical government functions into one large bill, then ramming that bill through the legislative process. Common sense says `look before you leap.' House Republicans apparently say 'just leap'," concluded Congressman Jackson.